

**The Bill Blackwood  
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**The Promotional Process  
Dealing with the Aftermath**

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**An Administrative Research Paper  
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## **ABSTRACT**

No matter what promotional process a department is using to make this decision, there are lingering aftereffects that have an often negative effect on the entire department as well as the community. Some of these aftereffects include low employee morale, distrust of the promotional process and the administration and the possible loss of a productive employee. In order to assess the need a program to deal with these aftereffects in the Alvin Police Department, a sample of officers from across the State of Texas that have been unsuccessful in a promotional process were surveyed. It is concluded that there is a need as well as a desire to have a program in place with law enforcement agencies to assist employees in dealing with the aftereffects of an unsuccessful bid for promotion.

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## INTRODUCTION

An often ignored concern regarding law enforcement promotional processes are the lingering aftereffects that can be detrimental to an unsuccessful candidate and also to his/her department. The potential effects for the agency may include low morale, a loss of trust in the administration, and resentment of the agency in general. The list of negative effects on the officer might include low morale, reduced productivity levels, counter-productive behavior, an increased level of job stress, and disillusionment of the employee. This would then give rise to the question, "What can be done to prevent these effects from occurring, or in the event that they do, could there be a program or procedural method in place that will assist officers in avoiding the typical negative feelings associated with promotional nonsuccess?"

Research suggests that there are specific strategies that can be implemented to minimize the effects of an unsuccessful attempt at a police promotion. Studies have revealed that, prior to the actual assessed measures of a promotional process, efforts should be made to educate and inform the candidates of what the process will involve, what the candidates can expect to see and do and how the scoring will be calculated and assigned does much to enlighten the officers, validate the process, and

reduce preconceived ideas about the process itself (Crouch, personal communication, 06/22/2003). Further, it has been shown that engaging in this form of "orientation" also does much to reduce the stress levels of the candidates prior to their participation in a promotional assessment (Crouch, personal communication, 06/22/2003). Similarly, research also indicates that a post-examination meeting with the candidates to offer them detailed feedback from the assessors about their individual performances does much to offer the unsuccessful some hope and direction (Coleman, 1992). This also serves as an opportunity to solicit the thoughts and ideas of the candidates about how to refine or improve the promotional process. Such a meeting also allows the candidates to understand how the process was structured and how the final selection was determined.

The author, through a structured survey of police personnel that have been involved in unsuccessful bids for promotions, intends to research on the need for a defined policy or program that addresses the aftermath of police promotional processes. The author intends to address specific issues in relation to the research question and will design and distribute this survey instrument to police personnel throughout the State of Texas. Current strategies that may be employed to negate the common stigmas associated with police promotions are addressed in

several sources of research that will be recognized and used as references during the research for this text.

It can be hypothesized that there is a significant need to better educate and inform police promotional candidates about the methodology and involved components of the process prior to their actual participation in it. Further, there exists a qualifiable and quantifiable need for a program or strategy to address the emotional and perceptual fallout when an officer is not selected for advancement.

The law enforcement profession as a whole will reap the benefits of employees that have trust in their administration and the knowledge that the candidate who is best qualified is also the candidate that will be promoted.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Law enforcement agencies have over the last couple decades migrated their promotional processes from what is referred to as "a good ole boy" system to more fair and impartial promotional processes. One of the most often used processes today and the process used within the Alvin Police Department is the assessment center process. This process is designed to remove the stigma that whomever is the administrations "golden child" will be promoted and instead, base the promotion on which

candidate is best suited to fill the position for which is being tested.

A promotional process that is perceived as fair and impartial by the participants as well as the department as a whole is a major concern to police administrators (Novak, 1999). Promotions have to be determined the fairest way possible, otherwise employees will lose all faith in the administration and the department as a whole will suffer. If it is the employees' belief that the process outcome is predetermined by the administration then candidates have no reason to participate in the testing process and employees will see no reason to do their best if job performance is believed to have no effect on the outcome of the process.

No matter how fair and impartial the process is designed to be, human nature to distrust cannot be removed, thus creating negative aftereffects to any promotional process. There is not a great deal of literature available in dealing with these aftereffects, so much of the research was gathered via a research questionnaire that was distributed to officers from various departments across the State of Texas. All of the officers surveyed have been involved in at least one promotional process in which they were not successful in their bid to be promoted. The general consensus of these officers is that there are indeed lingering negative aftereffects and that there is a

need to have some sort of mechanism in place to assist in dealing with these aftereffects.

Research indicates that there is a plethora of preconceived beliefs about promotional processes in the law enforcement community. Some of these preconceived beliefs include:

- The most senior person gets the promotion(Novak, 1999).
- The "fair haired" person always gets promoted (Middleton, personal communication, 05/24/2003).
- It's not what you know; it's who you know (Middleton, personal communication, 05/24/2003).

Even within larger police departments there is a great deal of distrust in the promotional process and also with the administration itself when it comes to predetermining or "fixing" the processes. In interviewing numerous line level officers from different departments across the State of Texas, the author has found that some of these officers feel that the outcome of promotional processes are predetermined by their departments' administration. The belief is that the person that has most of the administration's "good graces" will get the promotion. This of course leads to morale problems that effect the department as a whole.

Whetstone (2001) states that dealing with an employee that has failed in an attempt to be promoted is often difficult as there are employees who neither desire nor are equipped to



compete in a promotional process and that often those who do not gain promotion are left feeling like failures. These employees grow disenchanted and become cynical nonparticipants in subsequent promotional opportunities (Scarborough, 2000, as quoted in Whetstone, 2001). This attitude leads to the possibility that an officer that participated in a promotional process before he had matured into a seasoned officer and that would make a good supervisor now, will not participate so a potentially good supervisor is lost.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Is there a need for some type of program to be put in place that assists personnel in dealing with the negative aftereffects of being involved in an unsuccessful attempt at promotion?

Survey research indicates there is a definite need in the law enforcement profession for a mechanism to be put in place that deals with the negative aftereffects that also affect unsuccessful candidates for promotion but also departments as a whole. The literature researched unequivocally supports the survey findings.

There was a limited amount of written literature available that was associated with this topic so several past Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas Administrative Research Papers discussing promotional processes were utilized.

A limited number of magazine articles were located that also addressed promotional processes but nothing that directly discussed dealing with the feelings after a process.

The written survey was distributed to seven different police agencies located in various areas of the State of Texas. Targeted agencies were varied in size from very large departments such as the Austin Police Department to smaller departments such as the Friona Police Department. The surveys were targeted at officers that had been unsuccessfully involved in promotional processes. The officers surveyed ranged in police service time from eight years to thirty-two years. One hundred surveys were provided to departments with a return rate of eighty percent or eighty responses.

The information received is broken down to indicate whether or not there is a specific need to implement a program to assist officers as well as departments in dealing with the negative and often detrimental aftereffects of a promotional process. All results will be broken down into percentages for each survey question and then into a graph (figure 1) for easier analysis.

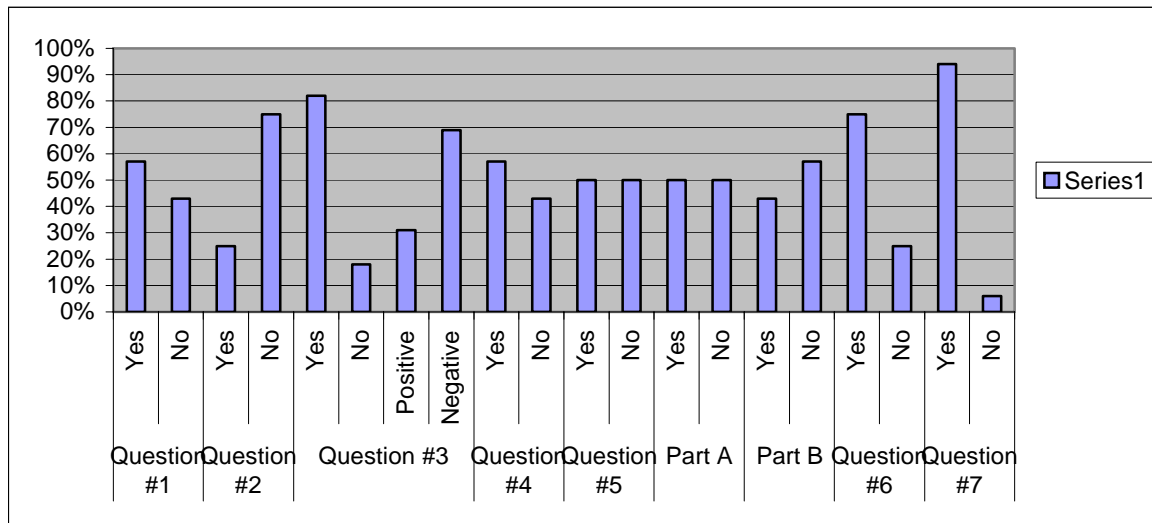
## **FINDINGS**

Research indicates that there is a definite need for a program to be in place to assist the unsuccessful candidate for a promotion in dealing with his or her after process feelings.

The program will also assist to dispel the negative preconceptions that the outcome of the promotional process was predetermined by the department administration.

The information included on the graph below (figure 1) indicates that there is a problem that needs to be addressed.

Figure 1 Survey Results



**Questions for the graph are as follows:**

*#1. Was the outcome of the promotional process fair and impartial?*

Research data indicates that this is 57% Yes and 43% No. The numbers are far from a desired level of trust in a fair and impartial process.

*#2. Did you share your feelings with a member of the administration or a supervisor?*

Research data indicates that 25% did share their feeling with a supervisor or a member of administration while 75% did not. This

indicates a level of inapproachability or distrust in the supervisors and administration.

*#3. Did you share your feelings with any of your peers?*

Research data indicates that 82% shared their feelings with their peers while only 18% did not.

*3a. Were the feelings that you shared negative or positive?*

These shared feelings were negative 69% of the time compared to only 31% positive. This indicates that the distrust of the process and of the administration is being quite openly shared between line-level personnel.

*#4. Were the working and dimensions explained thoroughly?*

The research data indicates that the opinion that the process was explained thoroughly prior to the process is more evenly split at 57% "yes" and 43% "no".

*#5. Was there an after process meeting to explain your performance?*

Research data indicates that it was an equal split (50%/50%) that there was an after-process meeting.

*5a. Were your strong and weak points discussed?*

Again, research shows that the candidates strong and weak points were addressed at this meeting 50% of the time.

*5b. Were the dimensions and weighting explained?*

When asked if the dimensions and weighting were explained in the after-process meeting, 43% answered "yes" while 57% said "no".

*#6. Do you feel that this meeting assisted you in dealing with your feelings?*

Research data indicates that officers felt that 75% of the time, the after-process meeting assisted them in dealing with their feelings over the process while 25% felt that it did not help at all.

*#7. Do you think that this type of meeting will assist other officers in dealing with their feelings?*

Research data indicates that a resounding 94% of officers feel that an after process meeting where a discussion covering both strong and weak points of the candidate and a complete explanation of the dimensions and weighting system are explained will assist future promotional candidates in better dealing with the negative feelings of an unsuccessful attempt for promotion.

## **DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS**

The lingering aftereffects from a promotional process can be detrimental to an unsuccessful candidate and also to the department itself. The possible effects to the department include low morale and loss of trust in the administration and also in the department as a whole. The possible effects to the officer are inclusive of low morale, non-productivity, counter-productivity, stress, disillusionment with the department, and

sometimes, the loss of a productive employee. The questions concerning this matter are: Should there be a program in place to prevent these effects from occurring or in the case that they do? Should there be a program in place to assist the involved officers in better dealing with the issues of being unsuccessful in their attempt to be promoted?

### **Promotional Process Preconceptions**

The research indicates that there is a plethora of preconceived beliefs about promotional processes in the law enforcement community. Some of these beliefs come from the infamous "Good Ole Boy" stigma that plagues the profession still today, especially within smaller departments where it is often still utilized.

Some of these preconceived beliefs include:

- "The most senior person gets the promotion"(Novak, 1999).
- "The fair haired person always gets promoted" (Middleton, personal communication, 05/24/2003).
- "It's not what you know, it's who you know" (Middleton, personal communication, 05/24/2003).

The following are steps that can be put in place to dispel the preconceived notions about promotional processes and to assist in reducing and better dealing with the negative aftereffects of a promotional process.

### **Prior to the Promotional Process**

The research indicates that by far the most often used and most job-related method of selection (Busbee, 1997; O'Leary, 1991) for promotional process is the Assessment Center Process and it is sometimes, as with the Alvin Police Department, administered in conjunction with some type of written knowledge exam.

It is the general opinion of officers that were interviewed that there is a significant need for a two-part program to be put in place to assist the impacted employees with negative perceptions about promotional processes. The program, to be effective, has to start prior to the process, not after it's completion.

Steps have to be taken to negate the universal distrust of the promotional process and departmental management (Whetstone, 2001). The first part should consist of a pre-process meeting that takes place with the process administrator approximately three days prior to the actual promotional process. During this meeting several steps of instruction with the candidates should take place.

### **Dimensions and Weighting**

One of these steps is a complete and thorough explanation of the Assessment Center Process. This explanation should include instructions on the dimensions and how they are weighted

for each different type of assessment center in the process. The test administrator should deliver this portion of the instruction. The test administrator should be someone that will not be involved as an assessor but that is very knowledgeable on the subject. If not explained properly, this can by far be the most confusing aspect of the process and if misunderstood can be thought of as the method that management uses to twist the outcome to fit what is their suspected predetermined outcome of choice.

It should be explained that there are several different types of assessment centers but (within the Alvin Police Department) only three will actually be used during the process. Every type of assessment center that could possibly be used, its dimensions and weighting system should be explained thoroughly. Which actual assessment centers that are going to be used for the process should not be divulged until the test date.

### **Assessors**

The assessors should consist of personnel that are currently employed in the law enforcement field (Novak, 1999) at a rank equal to or greater than that being tested for. It is preferable that all assessors be unknown to candidates. A sheet naming the assessors should be handed out to the candidates at the pre-process meeting and a discussion should take place to ascertain if any candidate knows or harbors any feeling either



good or bad about any particular assessor and whether these feelings will interfere with a fair and impartial assessment or with a less than desired performance by a candidate.

### **Study Material**

If a written exam is to be used in conjunction with the assessment center then the study material should be handed out to the candidates far enough in advance of the test date to allow adequate study time. During the pre-process meeting the time limit for the test and its place in the process should be discussed. The weighting factor of the written test in conjunction with the entire process should be explained thoroughly.

### **After the Promotional Process**

The purpose of the pre-process meeting is to dispel many of the negative aftereffects but in some cases they will still have to be dealt with. The aftereffects of the unsuccessful candidates can range greatly dependant on the individual candidate and on the anticipated outcome by the majority of the line-level personnel. It can affect a single person, groups of people such as a squad, an entire division or in some circumstances, the entire department.

Some of the possible effects to an individual person can include the following:

- Low Morale

- Loss of Trust in the Administration (Whetstone 2001)
- Non-Productivity
- Counter-Productivity
- Disillusionment with the Department as a whole
- Possible loss of a productive employee

Some of the possible effects to the department can include the following:

- Low Morale
- Loss of trust in the Administration

Morale is a very important aspect of the day-to-day operations of any police agency. According to Barb Wingfield, (Wingfield,B.,& Berry, J(2001). Retaining Your Employees Using Respect Recognition and Rewards for Positive Results. Retrieved August 23, 2003, from [www.applesforhealth.com/HealthyBusiness/wewmor3.html](http://www.applesforhealth.com/HealthyBusiness/wewmor3.html)). "many things affect morale. Some we can control and others we cannot". Due to human nature, some of the morale issues associated with the promotional process can never be dealt in any manner with but with planning, the vast majority can. The following sections deal with possible solutions for dealing with the negative aftereffects of a promotional process.

#### **Notification of Placement in the Process**

Stress levels are high while awaiting Notification of Candidate Placement in the Process. These elevated stress levels on officers that are already employed in a stressful job can be

detrimental to job performance so timely notification is essential.

The actual notification should be done in a private setting with the candidate and the process administrator being the only people present.

#### **After Process Meeting**

After the initial candidate placement notification, a meeting time should be set between the process administrator and each individual candidate. The process administrator should present the candidate with his completed process packet that should include the following paperwork relating to the current candidate only:

- Notes taken by the assessors (Crouch, personal communication, 06/22/2003).
- Final score sheets from the assessors (Crouch, personal communication, 06/22/2003).
- Graded Written Exam (Crouch, personal communication, 06/22/2003).
- Final Ranking showing all final scores and standings (Crouch, personal communication, 06/22/2003).

The process administrator should be familiar with the information contained in the completed process packet and be able to intelligently answer any questions that the candidate may ask. The process administrator should set aside adequate time to spend with each candidate so that the candidates do not

feel as if he or she is being rushed through the meeting and quickly dismissed out of hand. The meeting should be positive in nature and the candidate should be touted on his strong points. The candidates weak points should be explained and constructive advice given on how to better prepare for the next process. The process administrator's function at this time is to retain disappointed employees and also to assist them in understanding what factors, both good and bad, played a role in the outcome of the process and to reverse long lasting negative feelings about the promotional process and the department administration.

As a result of this research data, the author intends to rewrite and improve the promotional process policy that is currently used at the Alvin Police Department. The purpose of which is to dispel the preconceived ideas that promotional process outcomes are predetermined and to assist officers in dealing with the negative feelings associated with an unsuccessful bid for promotion.

It is hypothesized that there is a strong need to better inform promotional process candidates of the dynamics of the process and to solicit feedback prior to the process beginning. It is also hypothesized that there is even a more desperate need for a program to be in place to deal with the emotions and stress created when an officer is unsuccessful in his bid for promotion.

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